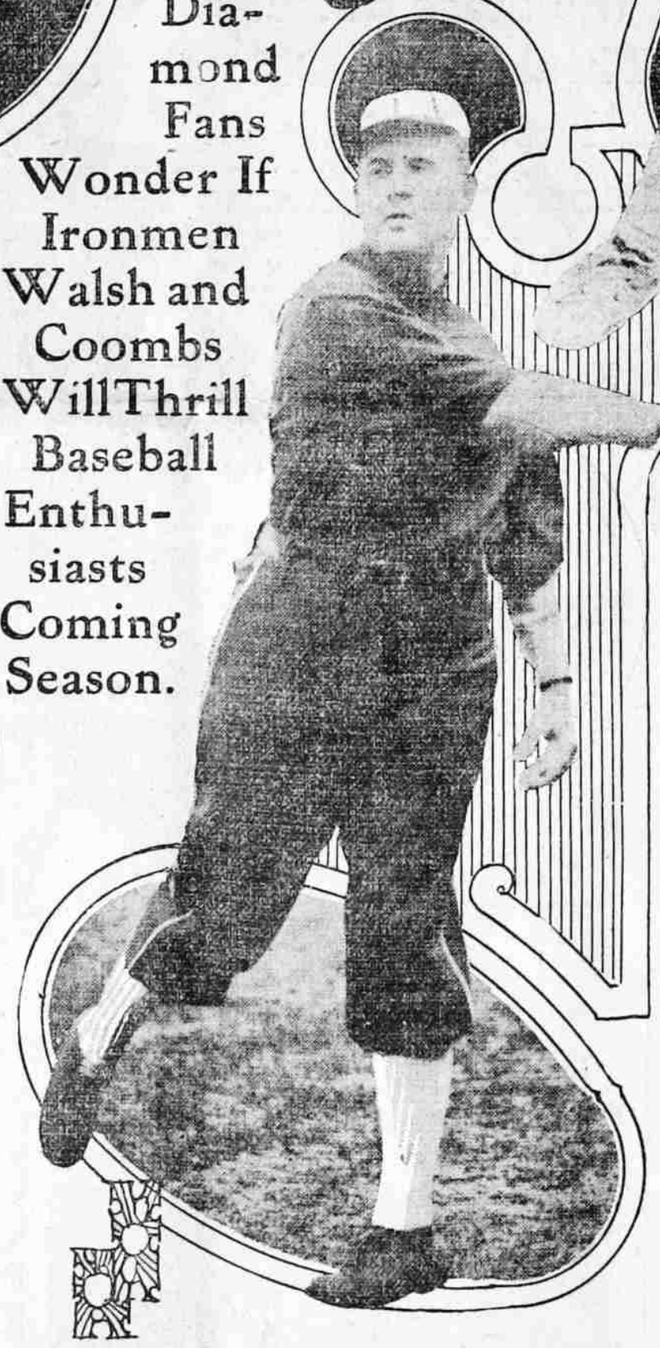
In the Shadow Of Baseball Tragedies

Diamond Fans Wonder If Ironmen Walsh and Coombs Will Thrill Baseball Enthusiasts Coming Season.



UPPER left, Ed Walsh. Upper center, the Athletics arriving on the baseball field. Upper right, Jack Coombs. Lower left, Connie Mack. Lower right, Jimmy Callahan.

BY BILLY MURPHY.

The practice of intentionally walking a batter who happens to come up at a time when a base hit means victory is not a popular one with a majority of the fans, though, of course, the pitcher must be given credit for employing strategy when he resorts to this plan to help himself out of a hole.

It has been a question of how the rules could be changed to prevent a pitcher from purposely walking a batter. He could surely do this without making it apparent that this was his purpose.

The latest suggestion for a rule which would give the batter a chance under such conditions comes from the veteran Jack Doyle, one of the greatest players the game has ever known.

Doyle would force the pitcher to put at least one ball over the plate before he could be allowed to walk a batter.

He claims that such a rule would give the batter a chance to show his prowess.

The idea is a novel one, but it would not help matters much, for it would be neither fair to the batter nor pitcher.

If the batsman did happen to hit the one good ball the pitcher would lose out just the same, and if the batsman did not chance to connect on the ball he would be in the same position as before.

It is not likely that the rule makers will make any changes covering this point because it is not an easy matter to adjust in a satisfactory manner.

But what will the new rule do to the overworked hurlers, if it does go into effect?

Two redoubtable workmen of the box are probably out of the game forever right now because they found the demand for box efficiency too onerous.

These stars of the national game are "Big Ed" Walsh of the Chicago White Sox and Jack Coombs of the Philadelphia Athletics.

Never did the Mackmen cross a field that big Jack Coombs was not the first man signaled out for the favor of the fans.

In the opinion of Connie Mack he was the greatest of the modern pitchers in a pinch.

JACK COOMBS PLANS HURLING BIG OPENER.

Singularly enough Big Ed Walsh, whom Jimmy Callahan, the boss of the Chicago White Sox, declared the greatest pitcher who ever lived in a pinch, broke down the same year as Coombs.

The latter pitched the first game of last season against the world's champion Boston Red Sox in a rainstorm.

It was in the city of the Hub that he took the cold that finally turned into typhoid fever at Washington.

Game to the core, Coombs battled against the ravages of his disease. Pronounced cured in September, he reported to Mack, but broke down again.

He is now out and pluckily says he will be in the box opening day of the 1914 season.

The Mack Men won a pennant without Coombs, but the White Sox were not so lucky.

Nearly everyone admits that if the Chicago club had the services of Walsh, they would come exceedingly close to winning the pennant in spite of their weak offense.

There may be considerable truth in this contention, too, for the White Sox of last season appeared every bit as strong as that team of 1906 which won a world's championship, although designated as the "Hitless Wonders."

Whether or not Walsh could have bridged the gap between the Callahanites and the Macks is not a part of this story, but a whole lot of the fans throughout the country seemed to consider it a raw deal from the hand of fate that the White Sox did not have the services of the Big Moose.

But there is an old superstition that you cannot have the cake and eat it.

Certain it was that Walsh could not go on forever working the way he worked for the past eight years.

Even his magnificent physique was bound to show the effects of the load he was willing to carry.

Only in one of the campaigns previous to that of last season had he been out for more than a brief time.

That was in 1909 when he listened to bad advice and held out for bigger money than his contract called for.

He reported without any spring training and did not get into real shape until well into the season.

Walsh is indeed a wonderful specimen of a man.

He stands over six feet in his stockings and is considered by many as the handsomest player that ever graced a diamond.

ED WALSH BORN IN PENNSY MOUNTAINS.

He was born in the Pennsylvania mountains and grew tall and straight and vigorous as the pines of the hills he climbed when a boy.

He was 23 years of age when President Charley Comiskey saw him playing with the Newark, N. J., team of the Eastern League.

Almost at sight of Walsh, Comiskey put in a claim for his services. But the Chicago president had quite a battle trying to land him in his camp, as Walter Burnham, manager of the Newark club, claimed he was exempt from being drafted as his club had a prior contract to play in Newark in 1904.

The big player was finally awarded to Chicago. While with the Eastern League prior to joining the Sox, Walsh was considered the speediest pitcher in the game.

He was even then not only a great hurler, but a good all-around player, as he could play well both the infield and outfield positions and frequently did so.

Walsh weighed 215 pounds in shape, btu notwithstanding all this sinew and muscle was exceedingly fast.

Walsh started his career as a professional in 1902 with the Meriden, Conn., team of the New England League. He was reserved for the season of 1903 by that team. His phenomenal work attracted attention, and after the Fourth of July he was sold to Newark, where he finished the season, winning over 70 per cent of his games.

While in the Eastern he won double-headers for his club on four different occasions.

Walsh was born in Plains, Pa., May 22, 1882. He was a coal miner in his boyhood days and it was while following that work that he first showed excellence as a ball tosser.

Walsh's great effectiveness as a pitcher was due to his spitball and it is the practically unanimous opinion that his continued use of this shoot put him out of the game.

Walsh, in hurling his fooler, always used a trifle of slippery elmbark in his mouth and moistened an inch square between the seams of the ball. His thumb he clinched lengthwise, tightly on the opposite seam and, swinging his arm straight overhead, with terrific force he drove the ball straight at the plate.

The American League during the early life of the spitter was referred to by Charley Dryden as consisting of "Ban Johnson, the spit ball and the Wabash Railroad."

Walsh was the Radbourne of modern days. Radbourne never knew the meaning of the word "quit." Neither did Walsh.

Other pitchers would insist upon a rest of four or five days between games. Walsh asked for no more than twenty-four hours' rest.

WONDERFUL DROP BALL OF ATHLETICS' PRIDE.

A famous feat of Walsh's was turned in 1908, when he pitched fifty-five games. He lost but fifteen of that number.

Defending the lightest hitting team in the American League, Big Ed carried the Sox through the year.

He practically bore them on his shoulders and when he set them down, they were tied with the Detroit Tigers for the pennant.

He had to win most of his games by holding his opponents down to one, two or no runs.

Last year he broke down early in the season at St. Joe and was never himself afterwards, pitching few games throughout the season.

Of Coombs, Malachy Kittredge once said:

"Coombs was one of the greatest pitchers who ever lived, because he mastered the greatest of all twirling assets, the drop ball that does not break from the right-handed batter.

"I don't mean one of those outdrops, but a ball that comes up to the plate squarely in the center and falls from one to two feet without changing its lateral direction.

"Amos Rusie had the same ball and he threw it with tremendous speed. Rusie pitched that drop and mixed it up with a fast one in close and the batter who could solve him consistently never lived.

"They tell me that Ramsey and other old-timers depended upon it extensively, but they never had the speed of Rusie or Coombs.

It is a wonderful thing to be a great twirler.

Batting is the soul of baseball.

It is what the keynote of a national convention is to politics; what the knockout is to pugilism; what flour is to bread; what roast beef is to England, and corn beef and cabbage to the Irishman.

It is the big punch and it takes a wonderful slabster to stop the big guns of the game when they are hitting or any other time, for that matter.

A .300 batting average has kept many an ivory skull in baseball. It causes managers to overlook errors of omission and commission.

The Athletics defeated the Giants in two world's series by everlastingly whaling the whey out of the ball, but they would not have done that if McGraw had possessed Walsh, for the big Chicago Iron Man always found the Mack Men easy prey.

ED WALSH TWIRLED IN SIXTY-EIGHT BATTLES.

Walsh's last season on the mound when he performed in a big number of games was in 1912.

He twirled in sixty-eight battles.

Sixty-two of these were American League games and six of them were against the Chicago Cubs in the city series.

In these latter games Walsh failed to get into only three of the nine that were played for at least an inning.

The 1912 records give Walsh twenty-seven victories and seventeen defeats, with a team that finished fourth.

There is no doubt but if the White Sox marvel had been pitching for a contending team in all of his eight years, as he was in 1906, 1907 and 1908, he would have made a showing in the official records that would never have been equaled in the history of baseball.

But, when the fans of the next decade look over past dope, they may wonder why Walsh gained such a reputation, unless they total up the number of games in which he performed.

If the new system of ranking pitchers had been in use during the last nine years, Walsh would have been on top, or thereabouts, every season.

It was just his luck to be out of commission last season, in which the American League pitchers were for the first time tested for actual efficiency.

Several times Walsh tried to come back last year.

His attempts were pitiful. It was sorrowful to see that once wizard of the diamond try to exercise his old sway and potency when his waning strength would not fortify his natural ability and cunning.

The Chicago iron man was broken and smashed, and with him went down the whole White Sox machine.

Walsh believes he has regained his strength of arm. Coombs is recuperating in the Maine woods.

That they may both come back and bring still greater honor and glory to the national game, is the wish of every true fan.

Where Our Popular Phrases Had Their Origin

"What is a popular phrase?" some one once asked. "Something we all repeat like parrots, without knowing its real origin or meaning," was the reply of the cynic; and to a certain extent he was right. How many of us, for instance, can tell how those common phrases, "tuft-hunters" and "fool's paradise" arose? We have an idea that the former refers to the person who seeks the society and apes the manners of the "Upper Ten;" but why "tuft?" and why "paradise" for the fool who shuts his eyes to threatening troubles and dangers, satisfied with the enjoyment of the moment?

As a matter of fact, the latter phrase originated in the theological argument that there is a place for fools just outside paradise, while the term "tuft-hunting" took its rise at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, where at one time the young noblemen wore a peculiarly formed cap with a tuft, which presumably attracted hangers-on.

Many other curious stories of the origin of popular phrases are given in "Everyday Phrases Explained" (Pearson). It is related that "Hobson's choice" arose from the fact that Hobson, a noted carrier in Cambridge, would only let out his horses and coaches for hire in rotation, refusing to allow his customers to choose, a customer being compelled to take the horse nearest the door. Thus it became customary, when anything was forced upon one, to say Hobson's choice."

"Eating humble pie" is a phrase which really arose from the corruption of the word "umbles" or "numbles," the coarser parts of a deer killed in hunting, which, when made into a pie, were formerly reserved for the lower hunt servants; while "cooking his goose" is a phrase which originated when the King of Sweden, on approaching a hostile town, excited the contempt of the inhabitants by the smallness of his army. To express this they hung out a goose for him to shoot at, whereupon the King set fire to the town to "cook the goose."

Long ago unscrupulous people used to have a cat tied in a bag to market, where they tried to sell it for a pig. If, however, a purchaser opened the bag before buying, the cat, of course, jumped out, displaying the fraud. Hence the term "letting the cat out of the bag."

"Going to the dogs" comes from the East, where dogs are scavengers of the streets, and become so unclean as to be unfit to touch; while the expression, "Tell it to the marines," used to show disbelief in the truth of a story, arose from the fact that when the marines first went afloat they were naturally rather "green" concerning nautical affairs, and someone who related a very tall yarn was told to "tell it to the marines," the idea being that they could be more easily gulled.

It is a curious fact that the phrase 'Bald as a badger" owes its origin to authors of the past who had no exact knowledge of natural history and who because the forehead of a badger is covered with smooth, white hairs, came to the conclusion that it was bald.

Years ago a theatrical manager of the bogus type had in his company an actor whose strong point was the ghost of "Hamlet." If his salary was not forthcoming on Saturday this actor would exclaim, "Then the ghost won't walk tonight," a phrase which is still used by actors on pay day, and which provides a striking illustration of how a casual remark becomes a common saying.